



# Tydings of Canaan Parish

Vol. 43 No. 3 \*A Publication of the New Canaan Historical Society\* March 2016

## NEW CANAAN IN 1890

Presented by A. James Bach  
Sunday, March 13 · 3:00 pm · Lindstrom Room



Jim Bach will take us back to the late 1880's and early 1890's, when the decennial census determined all of New Canaan had only 2,686 residents. At that time, our town was still a farming community. New Canaanites drove their wagons over dirt roads and pigs sacrilegiously roamed over God's Acre.

But something major happened in 1890 that changed our direction from a shantytown into what we proudly recognize today. So please join us to learn more about the remarkable events that transpired in 1890. You are not apt to forget this report on what happened 125 years ago.

Jim knows New Canaan well. He was born and bred here and his family dates back in town three generations to 1916. After graduating from New Canaan High School in 1947 and then from Columbia University, Jim proudly served for two combat years during the Korean War.

After the war, his career centered on Wall Street. He worked on the "street" for 40 years and then retired to New Canaan with his wife, Vona.

Jim's involvement with the Historical Society is all-encompassing, including many years of service on the Society's Board of Governors, researching and lecturing on Town history, as well as teaching young students.

His program on Sunday afternoon, March 13, will not exceed an hour in length and will be filmed by public television.



This Tydings is sponsored by  
Walter Stewart's,  
and Stewart's Wine & Spirits



## A History of March

By Ed Chrostowski

Legend and lore through the ages have documented the truth that the only certain thing about March is its uncertainty. Nor is that characterization limited to the facts and fables of fickle weather. March's customary debut as a roaring lion is a staple on everybody's calendar, of course, and meteorologists typically offer some comforting re-assurance, though with guarded optimism, that the month will tip-toe out, meek as a lamb.

There was slight departure from that familiar script, however, in 1888, the year of the infamous blizzard. It snowed non-stop for three days (March 11-14), all but paralyzing the entire Northeast under accumulations that ranged from 20 to 60 inches with gale-force winds whipping up drifts as high as 20 feet in this area. March's exit was hardly lamb-like that year as arctic temperatures froze huge remnants of "The White Hurricane" in place well into April. Final tallies from 10 states attributed 400 deaths and damages upwards of \$20 million (\$50 million by today's standards) to the storm.

March seems to have an affinity for catastrophic snow. In March, 1910, snow avalanches in the Cascades, a mountain range stretching through Oregon and Washington into western Canada, buried three passenger trains, killing 118 people. But March is noteworthy for far more than just weather. Historically, events that occurred during the month run the full gamut of human experience from tragedy to triumph.

In the year 44 BC, when the Ides of March were celebrated as a mid-month holiday, Julius Caesar went to the forum and we all know how that turned out when he ran into Brutus and his co-conspirators. More than 2,000 years later an attempt was made on the life of another government leader. This time, March 30, 1981, Ronald Reagan, president of the United States, was an assassin's target, but he survived his bullet wounds.

It was in March also when the downfall of another American president began to unfold. Seven of Richard M. Nixon's top aides were indicted on March 1, 1974, for their roles in the nefarious Watergate break-in. Four months later, he became the first and only U.S. President to resign. Small wonder, then, that the pertinence of "March Madness" goes well beyond the college basketball frenzy or that Lewis Carroll insisted that the March Hare met by Alice in Wonderland had to be stark raving mad.

March also rates a special niche in American history. It was during that month in 1775 that Patrick Henry gave his fiery "give me liberty or give me death" speech, spurring colonial troops on in the revolution against Britain's King George. A year later, March 17, 1776, the colonies celebrated their first military victory and the British were forced to leave Boston. Boston's heavily Irish population still celebrates Evacuation Day as well as St. Patrick's Day on March 17.

Back in 1776, word of the Boston evacuation that month reached New York and another colonial official was instructed to begin arrangements for a similar British exit ceremony there. He was Gouverneur Morris, New York's delegate to the Continental Congress. Later that year, he headed the official escort for departing British officers and in 1804 he delivered the eulogy at Alexander Hamilton's funeral. More than two centuries later, one of his descendants, Gouverneur Morris Nichols, lived on Carter Street and was chairman of New Canaan's Town Planning and Zoning Commission for many years.

Also in March, this time on the 29th in 1979, the "melt-down" of a nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island, Pa., caused the nation's first atomic energy accident. Some radioactive gasses escaped, but the area was evacuated and no lasting ill effects were reported. A billion dollar clean-up was required, however, and took years to complete. The incident also aroused national concerns about nuclear safety and some resistance to use of atomic energy ensued.

International tensions eased a bit when Stalin died in March, 1953, but the respite was brief. In March five years later, Nikita Khrushchev became the Soviet premier, banging his shoe on a UN desk and promising to "bury" the United States.

Over-all, however, March has been a month of happier headlines. Making them were President John F. Kennedy launching the Peace Corps (1961), NASA sending a test ship into orbit (1964) in preparation for Project Mercury's first manned space flight and Alexander Graham Bell calling Watson on the first telephone (1876).

March was good to the music world too. Elvis Presley became a civilian again in 1960 after a two-year hitch in the Army and the Beatles arrived from Great Britain (1963).

All in all then, the vagaries of March were certainly not limited to weather or bad news. Caesar had good reason to beware the Ides of March. And there is good reason also to be aware of all sides of March.



## Lockwood-Slauson House

This newly plaqued house on East Avenue has an interesting history. An early owner, William Weed, lost the house and property in the early 1830s when he was sued by the future Postmaster and Town Clerk of New Canaan, Edward Nash. Nash had several concurrent lawsuits against Weed, all of which he won. In May, 1868, the property



found its way into the hands of Amelia Bowles Lockwood, one of the founding members of the Historical Society. On October 14, 1898, her husband,

Frederick Weed Lockwood, and his daughter, Amelia Lockwood Grumbrecht, died in the Mohegan shipwreck at Manacle Reef in the North Sea at Cornwall, England. In 1926 the house was owned by Josephine Simon, the daughter of a Civil War veteran, Joseph Bowles, Jr., who served on the U.S.S. Constitution and U.S.S. Minnesota. Currently the house is the cornerstone of a condominium complex and has been since 1972.

## Raymond-Comstock-Wakeman House

The history of this house is intimately tied to a sawmill and the associated community at the base of nearby Lake Siscowit. The house and the first sawmill were built by John Raymond in the mid-1700s. Since he owned land around Lake Siscowit, it was known as "Raymond's Lake." One of his descendants is Luke Raymond for whom Luke's Road is named. The sawmill was owned at least in part by the Raymonds until Thomas Anthony Comstock purchased it in 1848 even though the sawmill was in disrepair and, potentially, no longer functioning. Comstock dammed Lake Siscowit, which at the time was referred to as Lake Anthony, and built a new sawmill. Two blacksmiths' shops, a general store, a carriage shop, and a tavern named the "Rum Hole" were built in the area around this time. However, Thomas Comstock seems to have run out of money in 1849. He sold a third of his land to Nathan Lockwood, also known as "Quaker Nate," and gave the rest to his brother, the Rev. David Close Comstock. Eventually the land was sold to Arthur B. and Stanley D. Ogden who built their own sawmill on the land which they remarkably named A. B. and S. D. Ogden Mill. The house and mill were next purchased in 1857 by Samuel Wakeman, who owned the carriage shop near the sawmill. The sawmill fell into disrepair in the early 1900s and was torn down.

## In Memoriam

The Society remembers the following members and donors with great sadness at their passing

**W. Andrew M. Clarkson**, who died on December 18, 2015, was a member of the Society for 23 years. He was a donor, benefactor, and advisor to the Society. Andrew was a member of the Advisory Board from 1993 until his death. It was not unusual to answer the phone and hear Andrew's voice stating that he just read our report and had a few questions. The family foundation, the Jeniam - Clarkson Foundation, has supported many of our capital projects.

**Sven William Englund**: Despite the fact he frequently reminded us that it was his wife who had the New Canaan heritage, he seldom missed our quarterly meetings and was especially interested in any seminars or programs on the town. He joined the Society in 1984 and remained a member for 32 years. Sven served on the town environmental commissions for 34 years.

**Jaquiline Feary** is remembered for many things associated with gardening, but the valuable collection she gifted to Society is on the top of the list. Jaquiline listed and described the plans of gardens in New Canaan designed by landscape architect Frieda Stege. She presented the work to the Society along with a collection of slides depicting Stege's work. A loyal member of the Society for 66 years she also gifted several evening dresses which are now in our costume collection.

**Robert S. Jeffries** was a member of the Society for 28 years. There were very few exhibits that he missed. A great reader and follower of history, he was a great asset to the town sharing his IT expertise with many organizations.

**Barbara M. Porterfield** was a very active member who joined in 1988. Barbara served on the Board from 1988 until her death in November 2015. Always a gracious hostess, Barbara served on the committees of many fund-raisers and was our long-time hospitality chairman who was always present to greet members and guests at our functions.

**Hans F. Reiss**: Upon his death on December 23, 2015, Hans joins our list of long-time members lost. He was a member and supporter of the Society for 32 years. It is the loyalty of members like Hans that has helped the Society fulfill its mission for over 125 years.

## New Members from December 2015

Kit Devereaux & Robert Geitz  
Ms. Ann Nields

Joseph Riker & Susan Staudt  
Ms. Irene Swanson

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## SPRING 2016 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### SAVE THE DATE

### ICE CREAM SOCIAL—JUNE 5TH

Mar.	07	Mon.	Board of Governors Meeting	7:30 p.m.
	13	Sun.	"New Canaan in 1890" Presentation by Jim Bach	3:00 p.m.
	24	Wed.	Cracker Barrel	7:30 p.m.
Apr.	04	Mon.	Board of Governors Meeting	6:30 p.m.
	26	Sat.	Gores Exhibit Opens: Classic Cars	5:00 — 7:00 p.m.
Apr.-Jun.			School Tours: April 20—June 5	
May	02	Mon	Board of Governors Meeting	7:30 p.m.

**THE SOCIETY FOLLOWS SCHOOL CLOSINGS ON SNOW DAYS**  
**THE SOCIETY IS CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC ON MONDAYS**

Town House and Library Hours are:  
Tuesday-Friday 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
Historic houses open by appointment  
nchistory.org newcanaan.historical@gmail.com  
Call: 203.966.1776  
Fax: 203.972.5917

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